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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES.

Baltimore, December, 1890.

*THE POETRY OF THE FRANKS.**

When Clovis and his Salian Franks, leaving their possessions in the basin of the Meuse, advanced to the defeat of the Roman governor Syagrius, and to the conquest of those rich Seine provinces which were still, in name at least, a part of the decaying Empire, they already boasted a rich heritage of Epic song. Nearly four centuries had passed since the Latin historian TACITUS had recorded the customs of the Germanic peoples whose territories then bordered on those of Rome. He represents the Germans of his time as celebrating in song not only the traditional founders of their race, but also those more recent heroes whose deeds of prowess had left their impress on the national memory. Their history was the national poetry, and its central hero the Cheruscan Hermann whose signal defeat of the Roman Legions under Varus nearly a century before had struck a terrible blow at the power of the Empire beyond the Rhine. The songs which celebrated this event doubtless originated among the Cherusicans, but their diffusion among the other tribes could not fail to follow, until the hero of the clan became the hero of the nation. Be this as it may, we have the express statement of the Latin historians that the customs which he describes were common to all the Germanic peoples generally, and the subsequent history of the Franks is not the least eloquent testimony to the persistence of the poetic tradition.

Other heroes had doubtless already ousted Hermann from the chief place in the national song, when, in the third century, a number of Germanic tribes formed a strong confederation on the right bank of the Lower Rhine, and became known to history as the nation of Franks. But another century passes, and the Frankish people has already crossed the Rhine, yet history still records no word of the

heroes celebrated in Frankish poetry. And though it cannot be doubted that, when an ancestor of Clovis led forth his warriors to meet the dreaded Huns at the terrible battle of the Catalaunian Plains, the Frankish poets sang the events of that momentous conflict, no hint of such song has reached us, unless it be the reflection in later songs of the terror with which Attila, the Scourge of God, and his hideous hordes of Asiatics had inspired the inhabitants of Gaul, in common with the whole Roman and Teutonic world. It must not however be forgotten that the chief who led his Franks to the help of Aetius against the Huns has given his name to the dynasty of which his grandson Clovis is regarded as the founder. And if the theory be correct which connects a brother of Merovæus with the Alberich of the German Epic, it becomes all the more impossible to believe that the hero who took part in the memorable defeat of Attila should not be celebrated in contemporary epic song. But with the name of Childeric, the father of Clovis, is connected the first Frankish song of which we have any record. It has been splendidly demonstrated by RAJNA, that the chronicles which relate the history of the time contain the reflection of a poem of which Childeric was the hero. The same critic has shown that the chronicle which reflects the most complete form of the legend of Childeric follows a version of that legend containing modifications which date from the end of the sixth century. But the legend was doubtless developed from songs contemporary, or nearly so, with the events which gave rise to them. The legend narrates that Childeric had incurred the hatred of his subjects by his shameless and dissolute conduct, and a plot was formed for his assassination. The king, receiving news of the plot, resolved to save himself by flight. He left behind him a faithful friend, a certain Widomadus whom he had once rescued from captivity among the Huns, and who promised to communicate with him when he might safely return to his kingdom. The Franks chose the Roman Egidius to be their king, and the crafty Widomadus persuaded the new sovereign to impose upon his subjects a series of vexatious

*This paper is designed to summarise the results of recent researches as to the origin of the French National Epic, especially those of Pío RAJNA ('Le origini dell' epopea francese,' Florence, 1884).

taxes, each heavier than the last. Though these were submitted to with patience, Widomadus represented to the king that the outrageous haughtiness of the Franks could only be effectually quelled by the death of several of their number. This advice having been acted upon, Widomadus secretly reproached the Franks with their base and pusillanimous submission to the Roman's tyranny, whereupon they resolved to endure it no longer, and recalled their rightful king from exile.

Such is the outline of the song which was still sung of Childeric in the seventh century, and which was doubtless already in existence (in some kindred form) at the end of the fifth century.

The reign of Clovis, Childeric's son and successor, is an important epoch in the literary, as in the political, history of the Franks. That his marriage with the Burgundian princess Clothilde was celebrated in song is more than probable, but more important than the marriage itself was the apparently insignificant fact that Clothilde had embraced the Catholic faith, whereas her people, in common with the Visigoths, had adopted the creed of the Arian missionaries who had effected their conversion. Thus, when Clovis with his warriors submitted to the rite of Christian baptism and professed the faith of his Burgundian bride, the Franks of the Seine-basin became the sole representatives of orthodoxy in Gaul, while the Catholic clergy, from the Loire to the Pyrenees and throughout the fertile provinces watered by the Saône and Rhone groaned under the heresy of their Visigoth or Burgundian conquerors. The war with the Burgundians was a war of revenge, but when, after the subjugation of Burgundy, Clovis marched to the conquest of the Visigoths, it was in his capacity as champion of the Catholic faith. And when, by the gradual extension of God's kingdom and his own, he had made himself master of the greater part of Gaul, his mission received the imperial sanction of the Byzantine Anastasius, who conferred on him the insignia of consular dignity, thus identifying the conquering Frank in the eyes of the subject Gallo-Roman with the old Empire which

the heretic Burgundian and Visigoth had so long and wickedly usurped.

The influence of these events upon the character of the Frankish epic was perhaps not less great than their influence upon the late history of the nation. The reign of Clovis marks the period from which the traditional songs gradually began to assume that Christian character for which many of the extant poems are so conspicuous, and which rings forth so prominently and triumphantly in the prologue of the Salic Law. In their literature, just as in their history, the Franks stood out ever more and more clearly as the western champions of the Catholic faith, until history shows us successive Popes placing themselves under the protection of Frankish armies, and a Frankish king crowned emperor in Rome. Meanwhile the genius of legend is developing the gems of history into a splendid efflorescence of Christian epic song. Of the four sons of Clovis who divided the empire at their father's death, one at least was destined to survive in the poetic traditions of his race, and indeed to exercise a more or less direct influence on the literature of three great nations. It is certain that the Thuringian wars of Theoderic were celebrated in Epic song, but it is also this 'Chlodowig,' this son of Clovis, whose adventures are found recorded under the name 'Floovant' in a French poem of the twelfth century, and who with his illustrious son Theodebert (Wolfdietrich) enjoys a second and collateral glory as the Hugdietrich of the German epos. But there is an incident of Theoderic's reign which is especially interesting as throwing light on the comparative study of Teutonic literature. The chroniclers narrate a descent of freebooting Danes upon the littoral province adjoining the estuary of the Rhine.

The Vikings had plundered the settlements of the Hatuarii and had mostly regained their ships, when the king's son Theodebert arrived with an army, killed the Danish chief Chocilaicus, who had not yet reëmbarked, and, himself taking ship, defeated the plunderers and regained the stolen booty. A Latin treatise '*De Monstris et Belluis*,' composed some four centuries later, contains a reference to the

gigantic stature of a certain Hinglaucus King of the Geats who was slain by the Franks. It is difficult not to recognize in this reference the reflection of a Frankish song in which the triumphant warriors of Theodebert exaggerated the strength of the vanquished foe. But a further argument in favor of the supposition that the conquering Franks celebrated this victory in song, is the fact that the epic tradition of the conquered Geats has preserved a record of the battle, which record is incorporated in the extant version of the old English *Beowulf*. The English epic records an expedition of the hero's maternal uncle Hygelac King of the Geats to the coasts of Frisia, where they were defeated by Frisians, Franks and Haturii. The events recorded in *Beowulf* and in the Latin chronicles of the Franks are obviously one and the same; and it must be regarded as highly improbable that the conquering nation, imbued as it already was with the spirit of epic song, should not have celebrated a battle which found a place in the epic traditions of the vanquished.

The Saxon wars of Clotaire I, destined a few years later to rule as sole king over the whole of that empire which he had at first shared with the other sons of its founder, also found a place in the traditions of Frankish national poetry. There is some probability that Saxon songs referring to the events of these wars are reflected in the account of at least one Frankish chronicler; but, be this at it may, there is the most direct evidence to show that the Franks themselves celebrated Clotaire's Saxon wars in epic song. The evidence only points indeed to the existence of these songs at the end of the seventh century, and we find them then substituting for the son of Clovis another Clotaire, father of the illustrious Dagobert; but this substitution of more recent heroes in the place of those more remote is a common phenomenon of epic tradition, and it has been ably demonstrated by RAJNA that the Saxon wars which formed the subject of these songs were none other than those which history attributes to the first Clotaire, youngest son of the great Clovis and brother of Theoderic. RAJNA has also advanced the hypothesis that Caribert, son of this same Clotaire, has left a trace in the Florent (*Clotar-ing*?) of

an extant fourteenth-century poem, and is also connected by the links of oral and poetic tradition with the Girbert of a thirteenth century composition.

The history of the latter half of the sixth century presents a loathsome record of crime and bloodshed unrelieved by any redeeming feature. But this period was an epoch of vital importance in the development of the epic poetry of the Franks. It is established that by the end of the sixth century the vast majority of the Frankish nation had adopted the language of the conquered Gallo-Romans. The attainment of this result was of necessity preceded by a bilingual period during which the Franks were gradually discarding the old language for the new. And during this bilingual period—doubtless of no inconsiderable length—none of the Franks could have a more complete and ready command of both tongues than the wandering minstrels, equally at home in the most German portions of Austrasia and the least Germanised districts of western Neustria. The epic inspiration throbbed in every vein of the Frankish minstrel, and the soul's song would not be checked because it found a new language on the minstrel's lips. He sang because he could not but sing, because his father had sung before him, little dreaming that his song was the birth of a great national literature. But so it was, and the splendid literature of mediæval and of modern France owes its first origin to the epic traditions of those warrior tribes from whom, and not from the more numerous Gallo-Romans, the French people has not unfittedly taken its abiding name. Translation may have preceded, and doubtless accompanied, spontaneous composition in the new tongue, but there was a special stimulus to original composition. In Neustria, where the vast majority of the people were Gallo-Romans, unacquainted with the Frankish tongue, successive kings could not but wish that their own praises as well as those of their ancestors should be sung in a language intelligible to the whole population.

That the epic traditions which formed the subject-matter of all this poetry have left no definite traces in the writings of later chroniclers is not surprising; for these chroniclers, ecclesiastics as they invariably were, would not

deign to gather material from oral traditions when they had at their disposal the detailed history of the celebrated Gregory, Bishop of Tours, who himself played no unimportant part in many of the events recorded in his writings. Nor is it a matter for astonishment if we cannot recognise any of these songs in the vast mass of Frankish epic poetry which is preserved to us, for it is the wont of the legend to transform the records of the distant past while incorporating with them the traditions of more recent epochs. Thus we have already seen that the songs of the seventh century still preserved the impress of the Saxon wars of the first Clotaire, while attributing them to a king of the same name whose fame, together with that of his son Dagobert, was still fresh in the nation's memory. That these songs were sung in the Romance speech is beyond all doubt, and it must be remembered that the new tongue, already ripe for all the requirements of epic poetry, bore no resemblance to the language of our extant documents, in which the attempt to assimilate the popular speech to the Latin of written tradition resulted, as it only could result, in a most barbarous and deplorable jargon. It may be assumed that the national poetry underwent during the course of the seventh century a twofold and parallel development. In western Neustria, far removed from that border territory where the ancestral German speech had yielded little or not at all to the language of the Gallo-Roman, the Romance poetry enjoyed a comparatively free and independent growth, while the Austrasian kingdom saw the new song flourishing side by side with the older Frankish epic, and subject to its powerful and unremitting influence.

The political significance of the seventh century consisted in the decay of the power of Merovingian royalty after Dagobert, and the corresponding increase in the power of the Mayor. When the supremacy of Austrasia was established by the victory of Testry, it was Pepin of Héristal and not Chilperic the nominal king who appeared at the head of the victorious nation. And the growth of the Austrasian kingdom under Pepin and his successors was fraught with important results for the literature of the Franks as surely as for

their political history. A new flood of Germanic influence invaded the epos of the Romanised Franks. And to this renewal of communication with the German poetic tradition must be attributed the existence in extant epic poems of certain archaic conceptions such as the Germanic royalty of the song of Roland, conceptions which could not have survived the long degradation of the royal race which formed so marked a characteristic of the later Merovingian rule. The close relations existing between the immediate successors of Pepin of Héristal and the papacy did much to strengthen and define that militant Christian spirit which distinguishes the best of the songs that are presented to us—the same spirit which found its practical outlet in the glorious deeds of valor which saved Western Europe from the dreaded Mohammedan invader, and had its glorious apotheosis centuries later in the achievements of successive crusading armies.

The figure of Charles Martel was destined to occupy an important place in the epic poetry of France. His splendid victory over the Saracens at Poitiers was doubtless made the subject of many contemporary songs, and its memory may perhaps still be traced in some of the incidents of the Song of Roland. But it is interesting to note that certain traditions which in the later French epic are attached to Martel's more illustrious grandson, must have originally related to the victor of Poitiers himself, in whose history they have their only actual counterpart. This substitution of a later and more celebrated hero in the place of one more remote, has already been indicated as a common phenomenon in the development of epic poetry. But the confusion of these two heroes in the traditions of later generations becomes still more intelligible if we remember that the fathers of both bore the name of Pepin, and that they themselves were known generally to their contemporaries by the simple name of Charles. Of those epic poems which form what has been called the Charlemagne Cycle, two at least—those which claim to relate the birth and the youthful exploits of the great emperor—formed originally a part of the poetic tradition which had Charles Martel for its hero, while a large number of

isolated episodes in other poems point to the same process of epic substitution.

When Pepin the son of Martel and father of Charlemagne assumed the title and symbols of a royalty the powers and prerogatives of which were already his by inheritance, the change of dynasty left the unity and continuity of the Frankish epos entirely unimpaired. Just as the songs which celebrated Charles Martel had partly absorbed, partly ousted, the epic traditions relating to Dagobert, so the epic glory of Charles the Great at once absorbed and outshone that of his illustrious ancestor and namesake. The epos of the Merovingians and the Carolings is one and undivided. And the unity of the Romance epos is rendered the more conspicuous by a multitude of typical episodes which are common to every stage of its development, and the similar recurrence of which in the epos of Germany is an ever-present testimony to the antiquity and community of the origin of both. The genius of legend even undertook the task of effacing from the nation's memory that breach of dynastic continuity which had no counterpart in the development of the national poetry. By a fiction dear to the kings of the second race, the epic songs affirmed the descent of Pepin from a scion of the ancient Merovingian stock; and the descendants of Pepin were so far from glorying in an act of usurpation that a theory of genealogy was seriously propounded which established a relationship of blood between the new dynasty and the old.

The Frankish epos was no artificial product of isolated and independent poets, but the spontaneous outburst of the national soul in song. And we have reached a period of Frankish history calculated above all others to exalt the nation's enthusiasm and inspire the nation's poetry. In the reign and achievements of Charlemagne the most ambitious dreams of a masterful race had their full realisation, the floating ideals of a people's poetry found a perfect and glorious embodiment. In the legend, as in history, the almost superhuman form of Charlemagne was destined to dwarf all others into insignificance. The Charlemagne of tradition gathered glory with the permanence of his own personal splendor. The poets still sang the deeds of Clovis, of

Dagobert, and of Charles Martel, but for the names of the traditional heroes they substituted that of Charlemagne.

Nor can we wonder that the great emperor thus supplanted all his predecessors in the poetic tradition. The annals of his reign seemed one long story of unbroken conquest; Italy, Spain, Pannonia, Saxony were but so many Frankish provinces. The Emperor of Constantinople was the sworn ally of Charlemagne, and the great Oriental potentate Haroun-al-Raschid sent him rich presents by his ambassadors. But the fame of Charlemagne did not depend alone upon his brilliant and extensive conquests. He was as great by his legislation as by his military achievements. And above all he was the acknowledged champion of western Christendom, and it is in this light that the best epic traditions are wont to represent him. His great life-dream was the moulding of Western Europe into one vast empire whose limits should be identical with those of a united Catholic Church. The Frankish minstrels delighted to sing of the victories of the Christian Charlemagne over the heathen Saracens of Spain or the infidel barbarians of Saxony and of Pannonia. And most impressive of all was the solemn coronation of the Frankish king at the hand of God's vicar on earth, in the capital of that vast empire whose glorious traditions were thus revived once more after three centuries of bitter humiliation.

There is abundant evidence that the epic legend of Charlemagne was already forming during the great emperor's lifetime. And of the poetry which remains to us it seems more than probable that the 'Chanson de Roland' had its first phase in epic songs chanted by minstrels of the Marches of Brittany at a period not far remote from the historic incidents of Charlemagne's wars against the Saracens of Spain. With Charlemagne we reach a determinate period in the development of the Frankish epos, or rather in its earlier or monarchic stage, as contrasted with the later poems, which reflect the disorders of growing feudalism. Charlemagne becomes the central figure of epic song. Its central and dominant theme is the triumphant conflict of Christian armies with vast successive hosts of unbelievers—all

identified indiscriminately by the poetic tradition with those Saracen invaders from the terror of whose advance Europe had been twice saved by heroes of Frankish race.

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SIMPLE, SENSUOUS, AND PASSIONATE.

In the interest of exact scholarship it may be worth noting that the passage of MILTON's "Tractate on Education" in which the study of poetry is recommended, has been very commonly misquoted. The following instances are a few from many that could be cited:

"Speaking of poetry, he says, as in a parenthesis, 'which is simple, sensuous, passionate.'" (COLERIDGE, 'Lit. Remains' vol. 2, p. 9.)

"Poetry, he had said long before, should be 'simple, sensuous, impassioned.'" (PATTISON, 'Milton' in 'English Men of Letters Series,' p. 189.)

"Milton, in a phrase often quoted of late, insists, among other things, that poetry should be impassioned. His full statement is that poetry should be 'simple, sensuous, and impassioned.'" (EVERETT, 'Poetry, Comedy, and Duty,' p. 51.)

"Or else they simply predicate certain qualities of poetry,—as that it is 'simple, sensuous, and impassioned.'" (GUMMERE, 'Handbook of Poetics,' p. 4.)

The passage from the "Tractate" reads as follows:

"And now, lastly, will be the time to read with them those organic arts, which enable men to discourse and write perspicuously, elegantly, and according to the fittest style, of lofty, mean, or lowly. Logic, therefore, so much as is useful, is to be referred to this due place with all her well-couched heads and topics, until it be time to open her contracted palm into a graceful and ornate rhetoric, taught out of the rule of Plato, Aristotle Phalereus, Cicero, Hermogenes, Longinus. To which poetry would be made subsequent, or indeed rather precedent, as being less subtle and fine, but more simple, sensuous, and passionate. I mean not here the prosody of a verse, which they could not but have hit on before among the rudiments of Grammar; but that sublime art which in Aristotle's Poetics, in Horace, and the Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni, and others,

teaches what the laws are of a true epic poem, what of a dramatic, what of a lyric, what decorum is, which is the grand masterpiece to observe."

It will be noted (1) that MILTON says "passionate" not "impassioned"; (2) that the three qualities named are used to characterize poetry not absolutely but in comparison with logic and rhetoric.

A few words may be added on the meaning and value of the so-called 'Miltonic canon.'

The line of thought followed in the "Tractate" is, briefly, as follows: The young men are first to acquire knowledge, secondly to learn to express themselves. First, therefore, MILTON would have them instructed in the useful arts, sciences, languages, etc., and secondly he would have them study what he terms "the organic arts," that is, logic, rhetoric and poetry. In arranging the order of studies he begins by making poetry follow logic and rhetoric, but upon second thought gives poetry the precedence of rhetoric (and perhaps of logic). Of logic only so much is to be studied "as is useful," that is, of practical value in disputation and the arrangement of discourse. As for the rhetoric, since that is treated as though it were a species of logic, we may assume that MILTON had in mind the rhetoric of prose, mainly or entirely. This being the case, he would naturally turn to poetry as a distinct branch of study. As appears from the last sentence of the passage, the features of poetry to which MILTON desires especial attention to be paid are: (1) The laws of the different poetic organisms: (2) Decorum, perhaps equivalent to style. That is, he would have the study of what may be called the higher rhetoric—the æsthetics of poetry, or the study of poetry as a fine art—precede the rhetoric of prose (and logic?).

As my parenthesis suggests, we are left in doubt whether MILTON intended to place the study of poetry before the study of logic or after it. On the first supposition we get a hint of the antithesis of poetry and science that COLERIDGE proposed; on the second, a hint of the antithesis of poetry and prose that COLERIDGE denied. Whichever be the correct interpretation of the passage, the precedence is given to poetry on the ground that